









**THE BIG 4 OF INDIA**

## Works by Krishnalal Shridharani

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### *In English*

- War Without Violence, 1939  
My India, My America, 1941  
Warning to the West, 1942  
The Mahatma and the World, 1946  
The Big 4 of India, 1951

### *In Gujarati*

- વડલો, 1931  
ઇન્સાન મિટા દૂંગા, 1932  
પીણાં પલાષ, 1933  
પદ્મિની, 1934  
મોરનાં ઈંડાં, 1934  
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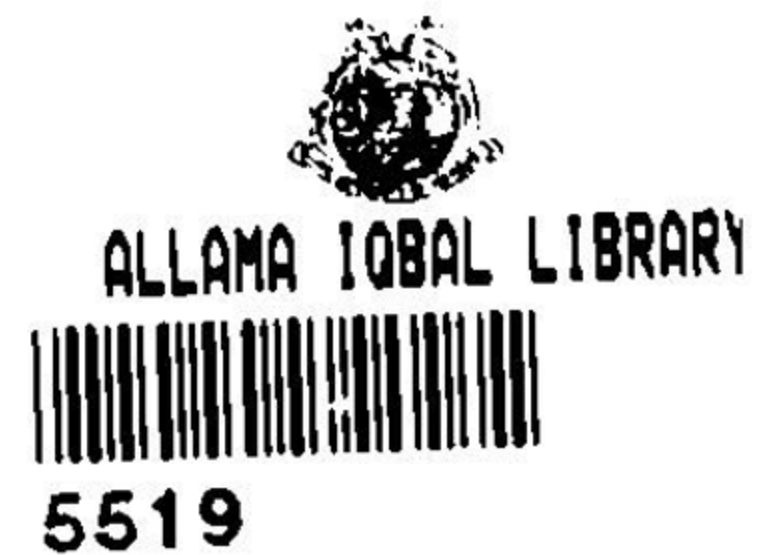
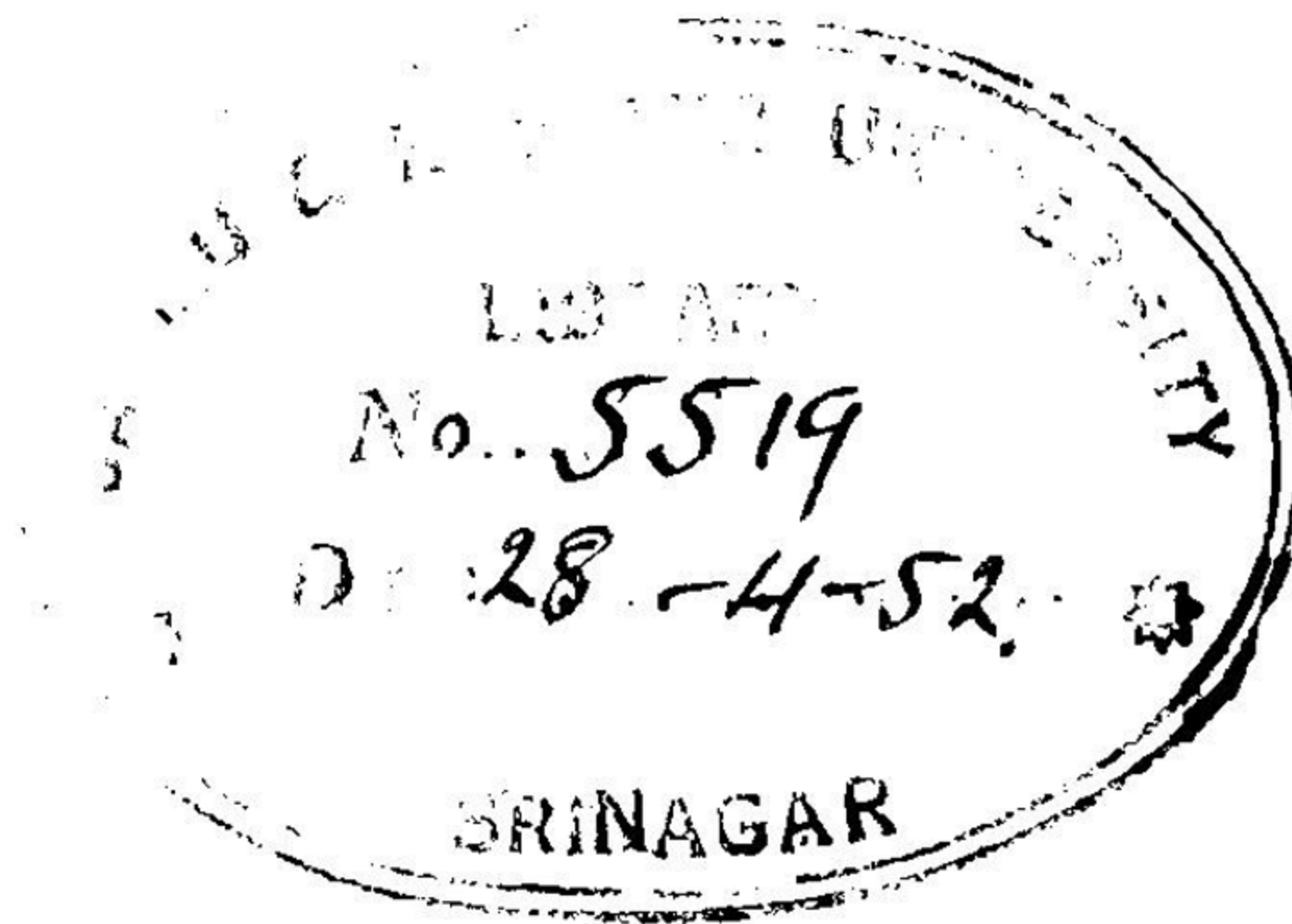
# THE BIG 4 OF INDIA

*by*

**KRISHNALAL SHRIDHARANI**

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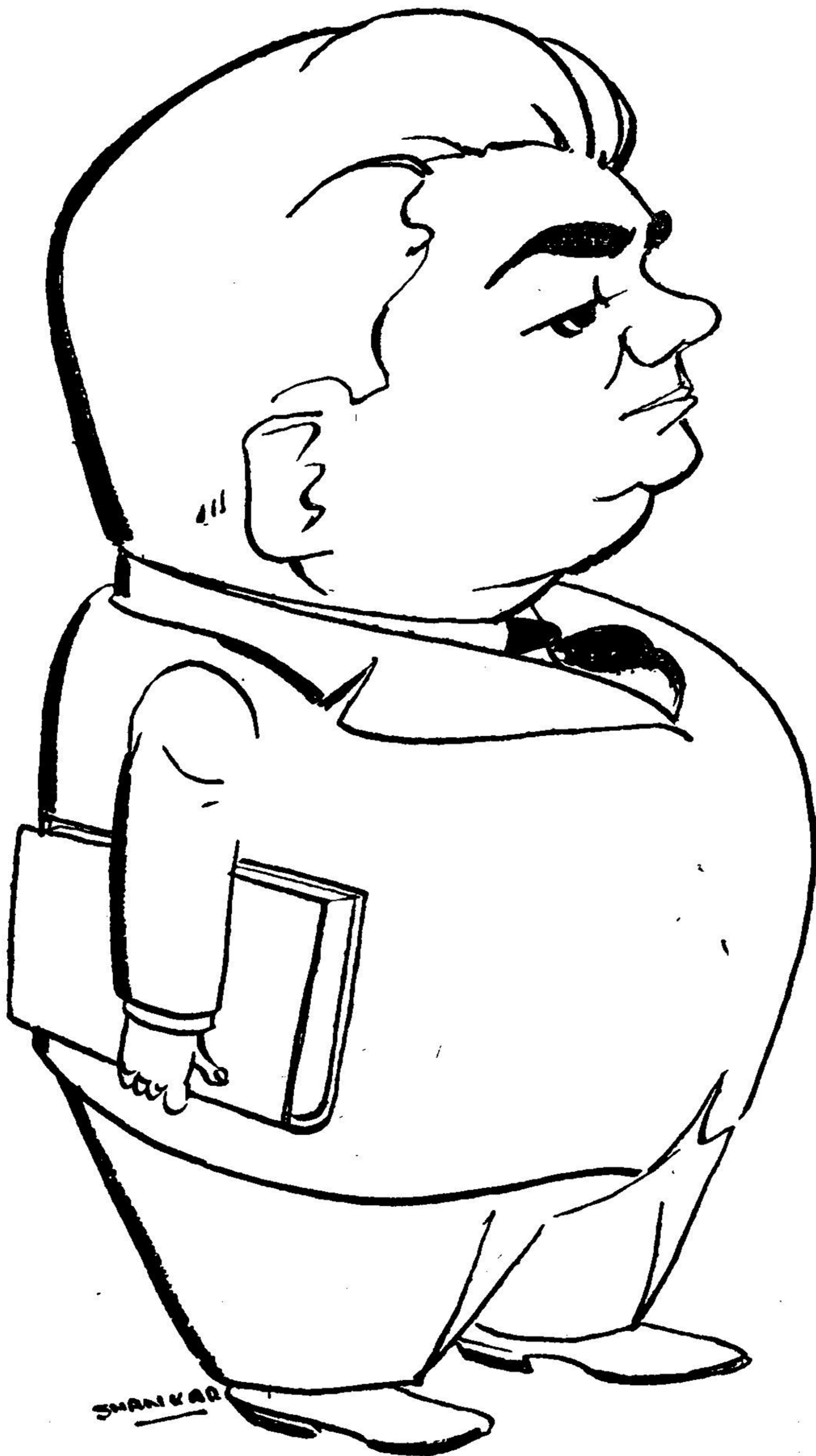
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The Author says —→





## **"FOUR WORDS "**

As we approach free India's first General Elections, we look at our great to gather heart, and we also become tremulously aware of the gaps created by the mighty banyans that have fallen since the dawn of independence. The Father of the Nation died so that the Secular State would long endure, and we somehow learned in the last three years to live in his light. The death of the Great Consolidator, on the hand, is too recent an event to permit mental and political re-adjustments, and so he posthumously continues to effect our thinking with respect to the coming struggle for power. The future is always decided by the juxtaposition of two forces ; I have, therefore, treated the Sardar as if he were alive.

For a long time India's leadership had looked like a pat hand. But now we hold three cards only and we have still to draw the mysterious cards—the first General Elections. Will we draw a joker or a jolter ? But we need not despair as greatness lies diffused in this ancient people, waiting to be freshly focussed and recognized. For, as Charles Reade once said, "Not a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers, and martyrs the greater part will never be known till that hour when many that were great shall be small, and the small great."



To me, the most fascinating quality of greatness is its earthiness, and of bigness its littleness. People in high office, or on high pedestals, are also human beings. A quaint detail often illuminates a whole personality, and gives a sense of coziness, of identification, to the reader. "They are like us, after all," the reader feels as he lays down the book. It is the little known facts about well known personalities that establish the rapport.

For this result of political and biographical journalism, I am grateful to certain editors for allowing me to use some of the material I had first used for them—they do not wish to be named. I am also grateful to *Shankar's Weekly*, and to Shankar whose one stroke speaks a hundred words.

KRISHNALAL SHRIDHARANI

Imperial Hotel, New Delhi,

February 1, 1951.

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- *He stands on his head every morning and wonders why the world is so upside-down !*

## NEHRU : THE LEADER

“YOU are working too hard ; you have too many telephones ; and you make far too many speeches that are far too long. Your sentence, therefore, is that you shall have a vacation of one week every year aboard Indian Flagship Delhi.

This was the sentence pronounced by King Neptune on Prime Minister Nehru as the latter stood accused in front of His Oceanic Majesty's Court on June 5, 1950. It was a mock trial, strictly in nautical traditions. Whenever a warship crosses the Equator, it is supposed to enter the domain of King Neptune, or *Varuna*, according to Hindu mythology. Thereupon King Neptune, attended by Queen Amphitrite and his Court, boards the ship and holds a sort of *darbar*. Those who are crossing the Equator for the first

time are punished to drinking some awful concoctions, ceremonial shaving and actual ducking in salt water in the presence of a cheering, and often jeering crowd. Needless to say, some of the ship's crew impersonate these Oceanic Beings, the theme of the costume being sea weeds.

### *Nehru Aboard*

Pandit Nehru seemed to have anticipated the sentence. For, ever since he boarded the Flagship *Delhi* at Cochin on June 2nd, I, a fellow passenger, began to notice that he was taking life easy and he was relaxing. "No wireless messages, and no files",—were the orders left behind in New Delhi. Usually he sleeps for four hours to five hours and never during day time. On board Flagship Delhi, he could often be observed dozing in an easy chair on the Quarter Deck after lunch. He also added two more hours a day to his usual quota of sleep. The rest of the time he played with his two grand sons, Rajiv and Sanjay, the very picture of the doting grandfather minus his beard. He did something else too. He read books that he had no time to read in Delhi. But his preference was for autographed books. "*Their Finest Hour*" inscribed by Winston Churchill, and "*Sixteen*



*Self Sketches*" inscribed by Bernard Shaw seemed to be his constant companions.

We were heading toward Indonesia and we were packed like sardines. A war vessel is not a luxury liner. Every inch of space is filled with something that is essential, and an extra single man or an extra maund of weight becomes a burden. The officers' cabins are generally glorified bunks, and on I. N. S. Delhi there were only two cabins (Captain's and Commander's) facing the Quarter Deck that had attached bath-rooms. When these were occupied by V. I. P.'s (Very Important Persons) like the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, even the Captain had to shift for himself. Typical of his breeding, Pandit Nehru's first enquiry on boarding the ship was about the officers whom he and his family were depriving of their cabins. "Where would they go"? he asked similingly.

On the morning of the day Pandit Nehru was to board the ship, the battleship was turned into a kindergarten. Because his grand sons were to accompany the Prime Minister, the "inbetweens" of the railings of the Quarter Deck were roped, a precaution against their falling off. The Com-



mander had another worry. Sardar Patel, travelling on the same ship a week earlier, had the Quarter Deck declared "out of bounds" even to the officers, because he was not well and needed rest. Would the Prime Minister need the same amount of privacy?—was the baffling question. Finally, he asked the Prime Minister himself and received a firm "No." The officers were cheered, because otherwise, they would have to swelter below deck, like the Ratings. The Quarter Deck is the only open space in a Cruizer, where the officer can go out for a breath of fresh air.

One afternoon we met for tea.

Why to Indonesia? What does South East Asia in general, and Indonesia in particular mean to us? Is this the orbit of our destiny?

I asked these questions of Prime Minister Nehru. We were sitting over a cup of tea in the small cabin of the Captain. On the walls hung photographs of Lord Mountbatten; Winston Churchill, the British King and Queen.

Becoming "reminiscent" Pandit Nehru replied: "There are obvious reasons. But for me there

are personal reasons also. My relations with some of the present-day Indonesian leaders started some 20 years ago. For instance, I met Mohammed Hatta, for the first time in Europe at the Congress of Suppressed Nationalities. I discovered another tie only six months ago. An A. D. C. of Rajaji's, who previously was an Intelligent Officer in the British Service at Singapore, gave me a copy of a suppressed letter that Soekarno had written to me while I was in the Ahmednagar Fort prison. I found it to be a very friendly letter....In between, when I was doing research for my book, *Glimpses of World History*, I was impressed by the deep and numerous ties that bound our two countries in the past. Despite the fact that some 90 per cent of the Indonesian people are Muslims now, Sanskrit roots (about 25 percent of all the roots in the Indonesian language are Sanskrit), Hindu customs and traditions and monuments still survive. The very name Soekarno is pure Sanskrit."

Pandit Nehru paused a while to eat some bread and jam. Then he continued: "And for the past three years our two countries have come closer still. India's contribution to Indonesian freedom has been creditable. We supported the



nationalist claims at the United Nations and in various other ways (Asian Regional Conference on Indonesia), we helped in the realisation of the Indonesian dream."

Our conversation turned to age. Aren't Indonesian leaders quite young? "They are", said Nehru. "Perhaps Hatta is the oldest, and he is merely fiftyish".

What a contrast to India! In our country senility is placed at a premium, while in Indonesia only 'teenagers come to power.

In view of the fact that Pandit Nehru had just visited Cochin and was going to Java, two of the most densely populated areas in the world, I asked him whether he was not in the habit of playing down the factor of over-population. "I do not play down the problem of population. I play down the tendency that regards over-population as the only evil. Indeed it is an evil, but it is not the only evil." Historian that he is, he reminded me that the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was concurrent with a decline in birth-rate. He began to enumerate the difficulties in the path of birth-control in India. Here Mrs. Indira Gandhi took an opposite view

and Panditji admitted that it is not as difficult to preach birth-control in India as it would be in a Catholic country.

Our conversation veered around to more personal and amusing matters. "Do you feel more hungry on a boat?" he asked me. "Slightly", I replied. "I, too, slightly", he concluded.

After a while, observing the rolling and the pitching of the Flagship, he observed, "Do you know, it is difficult to stand on one's head on this ship?". This was a typical complaint from a habitual practitioner of *Shirshasan*. Being myself also an addict to *Shirshasan*, I rejoined, "It is hard enough to keep on one's feet".

The question of seasickness came up. Pandit Nehru is a good sailor. Mrs. Indira Gandhi is a good sailor. But the family reputation was a bit spoiled by the slight seasickness experienced by the elder of her two sons, Rajiv, on the first day. Then we discussed with amusement how many Naval officers feel seasick even after years on ocean. Pandit Nehru was also amused to learn that many an officer or Rating does not know how to swim. "I thought swimming was a prerequisite to joining the Navy. Perhaps they take too



fatalistic a view of going overboard", observed Pandit Nehru. We also recalled that Vice-Admiral Parry, who was with us from Bombay to Cochin, had confessed that he had felt seasick several times in his career, while Air Marshal Ivelaw-Chapman had asserted that he had never felt seasick in his life. It all sounded so upside down !

### *Nehru Abroad.*

What is it that makes foreigners sit up at the mention of Nehru's name ? What is it about the man that enchants them ? What is it that makes the Indian leader's personality internationally appealing ? How does he manage, first, to arrest attention, and, then to hold it, in a world scene studded with stars ?

This is not an Indian query, I know. Tradition-bound India pays more attention to position than to personality. We are not success-minded, and even when we are, we attribute it largely to a man's position rather than to his personality. But in truly democratic countries, competition is keen even in the field of becoming a luminary. Hence the growth of the American approach, which vivisects the soul and analyses the personality in

order to bare the sources of power that a great man excercises over his contemporaries. This is a two-way process. The man is subjected to psycho-analysis, while the *ethos* within which he functions is described in the terms of social-psychology.

What makes a man tick conspicuously, then, is born out of the interaction of personality and *ethos*. Indian *ethos* is not quite the same as the Western *ethos*. Nehru may be outstanding in India for reasons different from those which make him a world figure. Over a decade ago, I tried to explain to my American readers, the sources of Nehru's hold on the Indian people. A national hero, I wrote then, starts out by being a legend in any country, though the *motif* of that legend may differ from culture to culture. In the United States, for example, it is the success *motif* and the log-cabin legend that appeal to the people. In India, it is the renunciation *motif* that galvanizes the masses. In America, a "have-not" should become a "have" to prove his mettle, while in India a "have" should voluntarily become a "have not" to prove his spirit of selfless service. An Abraham Lincoln rising from a log-cabin to the Presidency of the United States was in the



American tradition. Nehru's change of heart has been peculiarly Indian. It was in the tradition of Prince Gautama who became a mendicant Buddha. Gandhi, a *Diwan's* son, becoming the champion of the dispossessed and thus capturing the devotion of the Indian people, illustrates the same cultural determinant, Nehru, the Brahmin aristocrat, became Nehru the socialist and won his people's hearts.

The Indian spring of emotion, however, is not adequate to explain Nehru's pre-eminent position in the Western world. What sways the Indian heart does not necessarily touch the mind of the West. And yet Nehru has something that has made him one of the brilliant citizens of the world. In Hollywood parlance, Nehru has "it". To use another expression of that land of make-believe, Nehru has international "oomph". These are very expressive terms, and we have a vague idea as to what they mean. But unless we know the distinguishing qualities of Nehru's international "it" or "oomph", we are simply begging the question: it becomes a game of explaining an imponderable with an inexplicable. We have to take into account the personality-mindedness of the West.

For one thing, Nehru is *photogenic*. This is frightfully important so far as Western audiences are concerned, not only for cinema stars but for celebrities of all sorts, including politicians. Faces that do not photograph well have ruined many a presidential dream in America. Nehru is as high-spirited as a thoroughbred, elegant of carriage, and his well-proportioned head sets off a handsome physique. His regular classical features seem chiselled out of marble. His shapely nostrils flare with the sensitivity of a race horse, and save for his bald head, which is carefully hidden under a Gandhi cap, he would be regarded as "midiatimstically" exquisite in any part of the West. Women are very important in the West, and Nehru has already won half his battle.

For another thing, Nehru is *newsgenic*, if such an expression could be coined. The impulsive and the intuitive gives him the right inspiration at the right time. He has a flare for dramatic action, and his intuition sometimes converts his dramatic gestures into historic events. The Asian Relations Conference and the Regional Conference on Indonesia are good illustrations of the point I am making. Apart, however, from these outstanding steps, Nehru is good newspaper copy almost daily.



He is graceful, often unpredictable, and always at the centre of the stage, be it a small party or a mass meeting. The things he says and the way he rushes into a crowd without any thought of self-protection are always good for a despatch. He is the newspaperman's dream. There is always a story in him. And you have to be in the eyes and ears of the Western man, almost constantly, in order to be a leader.

Then there is the Nehru glamour. The West has come to know recently what India has known for a long time. Nehrus are Nehrus! They have aristocratic traditions behind them. Quite a few important people have borne that illustrious name. They dress neatly and even richly, know the fineries of life, have discernment in food and wine, and they are good conversationalists. They live fully and often dangerously. So knowledgeable people in the West are fascinated by India's glamour boy.

There is the *Hamlet charm*. Like Hamlet, Nehru cogitates in front of a vast audience, and does it in inspired idiom. Like Hamlet he vacillates, not in the privacy of his heart, but on a public platform, and thus gives the audience the

thrill of being witness to the workings of a complex mentality. Like Hamlet he is a *Prima Donna*, and like the Prince of Denmark he is moody ; his magnificent autobiography (which has played a decisive part in making Nehru a world figure) is a study in moodiness. Read that book, or hear him speak extempore, and you will find out that he seldom makes a clear, unqualified, unequivocal statement in the realm of thought. For his effort is to bring out all the subtle nuances. Many times his next sentence appears to cancel the previous one, but actually it is the poet's pattern to play with nuances. Nehru is essentially a poet and not a thinker, and he has a fascination for the lyrical twist. In a world full of politicians who make prepared and careful speeches and pronouncements, Nehru is the one head of a government who does not mind thinking aloud, and this gives his admirers a feeling of coziness.

So far as the West is concerned, Nehru has the *Napoleonic charm*. Napoleon's loyalty to his family, to his friends, to his Generals, to the people of his choice, is a part of the Napoleonic legend. Nehru has old-school-tie loyalty in addition, and this seeming contradiction adds special charm to an avowed socialist. Nehru will stand



by the person of his choice, and the more that person is criticised, the more Nehru will defend him. The West appreciates personal loyalties in a public man.

Nehru fascinates the West as a *revealer*. He is a sort of an interpreter of East to the West. His idiom is Western, so the West understands him. But he never loses the "native touch", the "local tang", and so he is exotic as well as understandable at the same time. His books can be described as "India Made Easy", or "Gandhi Without Tears". Gandhiji baffled the West, and India overpowered it with complexity. Nehru, with his Western idiom, lifted the curtain, and thus established himself as the revealer.

In a world full of politicians who are opportunists and manoeuvrers, Nehru brings freshness by the sheer nobility of his character. Here is an upright man in a field where few upright men succeed, and Nehru's guileless success in politics has intrigued the knowing Westerners.

Finally, there is the vague charm of Nehru's idealism. The Western man is practical and hard-boiled, and he is not likely to follow a Gandhi, or a Nehru. But he has a great admiration for a

person whose teachings he would like to follow but cannot follow because the world is wicked. Nehru is one world figure who has the courage to advocate what a majority of mankind considers impracticable. This phenomenon has peculiar appeal. It has brought Nehru admirers, if not followers, around the globe.

### *Nehru at Home.*

Nehru's stamina is astounding. He keeps on working like a machine, sleeping hardly five hours. Relaxation means to him a change in the type of work he is doing. Five minutes of lull would make him nervous. He likes to keep on going. He likes to keep on ticking like the Big Ben.

Nehru is a happy combination of English etiquette and oriental decorum, and yet he is too self-confident to be suave, and too honest to be smooth. But what stands out sharply about Nehru is his candour and I have never ceased to marvel at the phenomenon of such an honest and guileless man in the role of a successful leader. The fact that Nehru can be a tremendous national influence without being an actual party Boss, is perhaps a tribute to India's masses who are still



in the stage of hero worship, or it may be because Jawaharlal Nehru stands on the mighty shoulders of his great father, Motilal Nehru, or because Gandhi was his Godfather.

Once he wrote, "...and behind me lie somewhere in the sub-conscious, racial memories of a hundred, or whatever the number may be, generations of Brahmins". So Nehru is conscious of being a *tense thoroughbred*. He is candidly intolerant of cant and cant makers, and he has a majestic way of looking down upon those who have not as yet seen the Socialist light as he sees it. His friends have observed with agony of heart that the older he grows, and he is 62 now, the shorter becomes his temper. He rushes into a crowd, defying his own bodyguards in order to restore order. He is known to have even slapped persons. He is known to have dozed off on a platform. Sitting on a platform or in the Parliament House, he has been observed muttering to himself, and sometimes throwing paper balls toward the ceiling. He is often preoccupied enough not to notice the thing next to his nose. Once, near his car, he looked at me intently for two minutes at a distance of one yard,



and then expostulately, "Oh, where have you been? I had been looking for you."

Fortunately for him, however, and unfortunately for India, spleen is not so much of a liability in this country as it is in other countries, especially in democracies; Indians have a long tradition of paternalistic chastisement. In the second place, there is a certain nobility about Nehru's short temper which precludes any tragic denouement. Once he was furious at a fellow Member of the Parliament. Next day the man in question wrote to him a letter drawing his attention to his unfairness. Quick came Nehru's apology, unconditional and in writing. In the third place, there are too many understandable reasons for his irascibility; he has suffered as a martyr from all sides. His father died while leading the national struggle; his mother's death was hastened by the hardships of Civil Disobedience and the suffering she was once subjected to by cruel Police, and finally his gallant wife died a patriotic death on the altar of voluntary suffering. He himself has been an "in-again, out-again" prisoner, and a lonely soul even in the midst of admiring multitudes. His only joy is to play with his two grand-children who have the full

freedom of the house and who copy him while he is taking his daily exercises in the morning.

Not only as free India's first Prime Minister, but even in his own individual right, Nehru is the *supreme figure* of the country now that Gandhi and Patel are gone. The Foreign Policy of India as formulated by him has made him the white hope of world peace to the starry-eyed. Nehru knows Europe very well and recently he acquainted himself with America, and he is quick to perceive the importance of contacting international figures. For this, many disgruntled Indian intellectuals have charged him with a habit of over-estimating the importance of the visiting white-skins, and also with ignoring home-grown talents.

Nehru's special appeal is firmly founded on his internationalism. It has been his great contribution to Indian politics——this relating of the formerly segregated Indian struggle with world events. He has dented the insular mentality of India. He has broadened the Indian mind by posing the local problem in a world setting.

Nehru was the virtual foreign secretary of the Indian National Congress before he became the Foreign Minister of free India. For a long time



Gandhi entrusted to him international problems. He paid visits to embattled China and Spain and even before India became free, he tried to study Indo-Burmese and Indo-Ceylonese relations and contacted Mustafa Nahas Pasha and the Egyptian Wafdists.

What stood out most strikingly and ironically about Nehru during the fateful year of 1940-41—when the mortal struggle between democracy and dictatorship began—was the fact that although he was the most significant and devoted democrat alive, he found himself behind the bars of a prison maintained by the very champions of democracy. On November 3, 1940, Nehru stood before a British Law Court to be tried under the Defence of India Act. In accordance with the creed of Gandhi, he pleaded guilty and concluded :

“I stand before you, Sir, as an individual being tried for certain offences against the State. You are symbol of that State. But I am something more than an individual. I, too, am a symbol at the present moment, a symbol of Indian nationalism, resolved to break away from the British Empire and achieve the independence



of India. It is not I that you are seeking to judge and condemn, but rather the hundreds of millions of people of India, and that is a large task even for a proud Empire. Perhaps it may be that though I am standing before you on trial, it is the British Empire itself that is on trial before the Bar of the world."

It is good to recall this passage in retrospect. His prophecy has come true and today he heads the State in the creation of which he went to jail again and again. Nine times in his life he made a pilgrimage to prison. The constant confinement failed to smother the fire in his heart. The British Law Court had demanded 17 years and 9 months out of the 25 years of his allegiance to the Indian National Congress. Sometimes, of course, he had been released before the term of his imprisonment expired. All in all, he has spent 9 years in some 9 jails. He has participated in more active heroism. In 1928, he led a demonstration against the Simon Commission. He was severely beaten by the mounted police in Lucknow. On several occasions he scoffed at murder threats—and these threats have increased

It is necessary to know Jawaharlal's family background in order fully to appreciate his suffering and sacrifice. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and his slightest wish was a command in his early years. For two centuries, the Nehru family has possessed wealth and prestige. His ancestors moved down to the plains from the Kashmir Valley at the behest of Moghul Emperor Farruksiar. The Moghuls created them landlords. Originally, they were Kauls, but because their estate lay near a *Nahara* (canal) they came to be known as Nehrus. That was in the 18th century. Ever since, culture and luxury have been the lot of the Nehru family.

Jawaharlal's father was an outstanding lawyer of his day. His position in the nationalist movement was just below Gandbi's. But this did not bind him to the Mahatma's simple life. On the contrary, Anand Bhavan, the Nehru's Allahbad residence, is as magnificent as a minor Maharaja's palace.

At 16 Jawaharlal went to England with his parents. There he entered Harrow, and later went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and came under the influence of Oscar Wilde and Walter



Pater. Consequently, he adopted what he calls Cyrenaicism and what most people call hedonism; it was in the air at Cambridge in the first decade of the century. His ambition to play prominent part in Indian politics, however, kept him busy watching developments in India.

At 20, Jawaharlal took his degree from Cambridge and joined the Inner Temple. In 1921 he was called to the Bar. After 7 years of the English scene, he returned to India.

Gandhi and Nehru met for the first time in Lucknow in 1916 at the Annual Session of the Congress. That year saw the beginning of Gandhi Era of nationalism. The mutual admiration and friendship between the two—leader and lieutenant—grew with time. Twenty years later, they met again at Lucknow at another annual meeting of the Congress. But this time Jawaharlal was the President and Gandhi the retired General. Once Nehru said, "Failure with Gandhi is preferable to gaining a temporary advantage without him." Once Gandhi said, "We know neither of us can do without the other, for there is a heart union between us which no intellectual difference can break."

I recall the night of Gandhi's death. A few of us were in the Birla House, while the multitude surged outside. In one room lay the body of Gandhiji, while in the other Prime Minister Pandit Nehru was sobbing like a child. He wept as he must have wept when his own father died. For, in Jawaharlal's life the trinity of Nehru the son, Nehru the father and Gandhi the Holy inexplicable has played a decisive role.

The passing away of the Mahatma and of Patel has removed from the Indian scene the last men who could admonish Pandit Nehru. Every individual, in order to keep his sanity, must have some people who can tell him when the occasion arises that "you are making a fool of yourself". The man who occupies too high a pedestal for anybody to stand on equal level with, him runs the risk of losing his sense of proportion. But then, Nehru seldom had intimate friends. Most of the time he has been magnificently and dangerously aloof.

The acceptance of partition was as much Nehru's as that of Patel and others. Stout-heartedly he faced the consequences which were such as to try man's soul. There is a myth about him that he is a waiverer in comparison to someone



else who was "the strong silent man." An objective study of the history of Indian Nationalism shows that whenever firm decision and action were necessary, it was Nehru who took them. On the eve of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact, it was Nehru who had ordered the Indian Army to array itself on the border of East Bengal. While he sought peace, he was ready to fight.

It is reported that recently he wrote to the Congress President that in the Working Committee he felt like a square peg in a round hole. This is true also of the larger orbits he has drawn. Ideologically speaking, he has little in common with his Cabinet colleagues while he shares most of his views with those who are regarded as rebels. The latter group does not say so, but implies that Nehru is betraying the revolutionary cause. The idea of a "Welfare State" that he cherishes cannot be enhanced so long as he remains a prisoner of his party—so reason the rebels and the Socialists. On the eve of the first general elections, the liberal and Leftist forces are pulling him one way, while his party loyalties are pulling him in the opposite direction. In between he is torn. Indian politics will remain torn as



confused until Nehru takes the logical step. A small step on his part, it will be a big step forward for the country. But will he take it? You cannot predict about the unpredictable!









- *He loves mango and milk, denies that he is a "Doctor", calls an M.D. when in acute asthmatic pain, and a Vaidya while convalescing.*

## **RAJENBABU : THE SPIRITUAL HEAD**

As I entered the air-conditioned study of the Government House, New Delhi, independent India's first President, Babu Rajendra Prasad *namaskared* a' la Indian fashion to start with and then amiably offered his hand in the Western manner. It was a scene in contrasting manners symbolizing the process of Indian thesis. European entithesis, and a hodge-podge synthesis that pervades a country recently vacated by the British Raj. And, as we sat down on a sofa in that room panelled with book-cases reaching up to the ceiling, I became tremulously aware of the several dramas that are packed in the personality of the constitutional head of the new-born State.

His is a story of a humble satyagrahi rising to the highest office the nation can offer. In this

respect, he has reversed the Indian tradition and proved that American ways succeed in India as well. In connection with Pandit Nehru we saw that it is the renunciation motif that galvanises the people. The log-cabin-legend, wherein a humble man rises to heights of success, is essentially American. Nonetheless, Babu Rajendra Prasad's story is the log-cabin legend.

The President himself illustrated the point. Reminiscently he recalled an anecdote. He had just become the Member for Food and Agriculture in the Interim Government in 1946, when he went on a visit to Ranchi in Bihar, his own Province. The British Governor of Bihar invited him to dinner. Babu Rajendra Prasad, talking about his metamorphosis from a jail-bird to a Central Minister, remarked that the most taxing change in his life had something to do with the huge building he was occupying in Delhi. "I am accustomed to huts as you see them in my *Sadakat Ashram* in Patna. Now I find it a bit difficult to get accustomed to a ministerial mansion."

The British Governor rose to the occasion and retorted that he, too, must prepare for a metamorphosis, and in correct medical sense of the



term: "I am accustomed to Governor's palaces in India. Now I should get ready to live in a flat in London". The Briton's was an account in reverse.

So here is an ascetic living in a palace reputed to be the second largest in the world—the largest being the one in Budapest. The greatest living Gandhian finds himself in surroundings that are overpowering, and yet he has taken the novelty in his stride. Here is a vegetarian who lives in a palace to which are attracted the most carnivorous gourmets of the world. Here is a teetotaler in a house that once harboured some of the most famous wine cellars in the world.

Babu Rajendra Prasad is tall for an Indian; he is 6 feet 9 inches. He weighs around 169 lbs. The swarthy man is a picture of humility and amiability. His full and palmaceous moustaches cover his upper lip. His Bihari style Gandhi cap, which looks like an upside down canoe, slants not from the centre of the forehead but from an odd angle.

### *The Second Man*

In Rajendra Prasad you see one of the two most important men in post-Constitution India.

Free India's first President is not occupying a merely ceremonial Throne in the impressive Durbar Hall. At no place in our Constitution it is clearly stated that the President of the Indian Union is bound by the advice of his Ministers. Although no occasion for independent action has so far arisen, there is scope for such a course. The President is also constitutionally conceived as the guardian of minority interests and the introducer of Hindi in the place of English as the National language, by well-spaced dozes. Moreover, there are such authorities in India as the Auditor General and the Chief Election Commissioner, who are not answerable to Ministers in Council, and who must, in the final analysis, answer to the President. The President is also kept fully informed of the daily doings and decisions of the Cabinet. It will take some time before clear precedents are established, but, until then, the President of the Indian Union will not function as mere figurehead.

*"Things As They Come".*

I asked Rajendra Babu what has been his supreme ambition in life, or his supreme achievements. He never harboured any hope nor



had he any ambition, he replied. He took things as they came. "If I had any ambition at all, it was to serve the country". The answer reminded me of a letter he had written to his brother in 1910: "If I have had any ambition in my life, it has been to be of some service to the country".

This, then, is the cornerstone of his character—to accept things as they come, to do your little bit in the circumstances you are placed in. Perhaps this trait he inherited from his mother. "She was a good mother," he said, "religion, family and children were her main concern. She was always happy in every circumstance. I am more influenced by my mother than by my father. We in India are always closer to our mothers".

Apart from his mother, the greatest influence in his life has been Mahatma Gandhi. "I had, and have, absolute faith in Bapu". The President is not prepared to regard anyone as his *Guru* except Gandhiji. It seems that some college professors did influence him in minor ways, but they are not worth mentioning. Nor could he recall any particular impact of any particular writer.



The spirit of service inherited from the mother became the spirit of self-effacement under Gandhiji's influence. I asked him what would he like to do when he leaves the Government House. "I would like to do some farming in a village in Bihar," he replied. The awareness of a history-maker that one finds in Roosevelt, Nehru or Churchill, is totally absent from Rajendra Babu's make-up. Others have kept complete records of their doings. In sharp contrast, it is hard to discover photographs of Rajendra Babu's childhood. Even Rajendra Babu's photographs of Champaran *satyagraha* days, in which Gandhiji dominated the scene, are not available. If he looks back nostalgically to anything at all, he looks back to his happy student days.

So many interesting details of his early life are missing. Apart from himself and his autobiography in Hindi, the only other source of information is his Private Secretary, Babu Chakradhar Saran, who has been with Babu Rajendra Prasad since 1935. The only change effected by the new President in the Government House establishment is this pan-chewing, khadi-clad ex-satyagrahi. There are two schools of thought. Previously, whenever a new Viceroy

entered the Government House, he changed most of his staff. Some say this worked to better purpose since employees did not develop the overtones of permanency. Babu Rejendra Prasad, on the other hand, is disenchanted by such details. So Mr. Chakradhar Saran is the only new element in the picture left behind by Rajaji. Like his boss, Mr. Saran is a bit bothered by the ceremoniousness of his new existence.

### *A Minister a Day*

The daily routine of the President begins in the wee hours of the morning. Formerly he used to get up even earlier, but now-a-days he gets up around 5 A. M. He does *yogic asanas* before taking his breakfast, concentrating on *pranayama*, or the art of breathing. "Do you stand on your head like our Prime Minister?" I enquired. "No *Shirshasana* for me. My adviser in *yogic* exercises has warned me against it. It is not good for me".

During and after breakfast, he reads newspapers and then bathes. At 10 A. M. sharp he is in his office, going conscientiously through files and correspondence until 12-30. Formerly he used to lunch around 10 or 11 but now he



must conform to the routine of New Delhi. After lunching at 1 P. M., he observes that peculiar Indian institution of siesta for an hour. Interviews begin at 4 and last until 6. 30. Then he goes on his daily drive in and around New Delhi, generally alone. At 8 P. M. sharp he has his dinner. After that, occasionally, there might be a private movie show in the basement Theatre of the Government House.

A Minister a day keeps the crisis away. In other words, at the average he receives a Minister every day, giving him half an hour. The Prime Minister rates hour and a half each week at the average.

Rajendra Babu has to keep his daily routine as light as possible on account of his health. The President suffers from chronic asthma. In Delhi, he is attended to by Dr. P. C. Dhanda. For years, however, he has been under the care of Dr. T. N. Banerji of Patna.

In his medicinal beliefs, Dr. Rajendra Prasad is more flexible than his Master, Mahatma Gandhi. He believes in both the Allopathy and the *Ayurvedic* systems, takes them by turn, never mixing them up. "When in acute pain, Allopathy



gives me immediate relief. But when convalescing, I find the *Ayurvedic* system more helpful". Dr. Rajendra Prasad is a man of balance and not a fadist.

*"The Mango and I"*

It can be said that he is not very particular about what he eats. He is not an epicure like Nehru. If he has a weakness for anything, it is for India's national fruit—mango. "My only regret is that you cannot get it all the year around." He is not only a vegetarian but he takes only cow's milk—no buffalo's milk for him. For years he has been connected with the All-India Cow Protection Association which requires of its members the taking of only cow's milk. He does not take tea even at breakfast ; long ago Gandhiji started an anti-tea campaign to sympathise with the workers in Assam tea plantations. Ever since, he has been a teetotaller who does not take even tea.

At breakfast he generally takes half a *seer* (16 ounces) of cow's milk, some fruits, some *chhana* preparation like *sandesh*, and some saltish cakes. Occasionally he takes cashew-nuts or *shev*. He and his family prefer rice to wheat. "We

are better off now that we are in the Government House. So many of the servants here want wheat, so in exchange we are able to secure enough rations of rice". At lunch he takes *roti*, rice and *dal*, and for dinner he depends largely on milk.

### *An Editorial*

It seems that Rajendra Babu's only hobby is not to have hobbies. But he has certain "first loves". High up on the list of "first loves" is Hindi, and yet he knows Persian well from his childhood days. He is one of the greatest proponents of Hindi as the national language, a fact that played a major role when the Congress Parliamentary Party was deciding whom to choose as the first President of India. Daily spinning comes closest to a hobby. It seems that he is the only one among the Congress big guns of Delhi who spins daily ; and thus emulates a significant part of the Mahatma's teaching. By the same token, he reads *Gita* daily. That is the one book that he loves to read and re-read.

Another item on the list of "first loves" is journalism. Years ago he became one of the founders of *Patna Searchlight*, an English daily. He also started a Hindi weekly by the name of



*Desh*. Not only he is a journalist himself, journalism has stood him in good stead. His is a career profoundly and fatefully influenced by an editorial. The editorial in question was written in 1902 by Dr. Sachhidanand Sinha in his *Hindustan Review*. Rajendra Babu had stood first in Calcutta University Entrance Examination (now known as Matriculation). It was for the first time that a Bihari turned out to be so brilliant academically, and Dr. Sinha wrote with prophetic vision : "Given good health, nothing open to Indians should be beyond his aspirations". The acquisition of the *gaddi* in the Throne Room of the Government House fully justified Dr. Sinha's prophesy. Here is an instance of what timely journalistic support can do.

Serving the underdog is also an avocation for Babu Rajendra Prasad. He delights in doing little services to little people. He has a touch of the healer in him.

### *Writer's Cramps*

How does independent India's first President relax ? "I go to sleep". It seems that reading brings no relaxation to Babu Rajendra Prasad. "When I read I am serious" If he reads at



all, which is seldom, he reads philosophic and political books and tracts on history. He seldom touches a novel. He promptly denied the legend that he has read *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from cover to cover. He is no reader, nor has he any time to read.

Even though he has the reputation of being a good writer, writing does not seem to be giving him much pleasure. It had to be done, so he did it. He is so retiring that he had to be coaxed by his followers to write his autobiography. *Gandhiji in Bihar* is the record of the Champaran struggle. His latest Hindi book, entitled *Bapu ke Kadmon Men* ("In Imitation of Gandhi"), is a confession of faith. If he ever took genuine interest in writing a book, it was in connection with *India Divided*, which was intended to show the folly of partition as demanded by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The book runs into some 396 large-sized pages. It is full of meticulous charts and statistical tables. All, except one chapter, were written in Bankipur Jail; the one chapter in question was written in Birla's Pilani.

*India Divided* has undergone some historical ironies. It was meant as an argument against

partition, but when the partition came and the term "notional" became popular, this very volume became a source book. Both the sides depended upon the tables and charts given by Dr. Rajendra Prasad to prove their points. This book was meant to underline India's unity. Later on, it was cited in favour of disunity. I met a Sindhi recently in Karachi. The Pakistan Government failed to prove him to be an "intending evacuee" until they discovered a copy of Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* in his library. When I told this anecdote to the President, he laughed sadly. That is his special quality ; he can laugh sadly.

### *The Social Ladder*

There are some distinct landmarks in Rajendra Prasad's unsought rise. The following is the ladder of distinction, although he would number the rungs differently were he to arrange them.

He practised at the Calcutta High Court from 1911 to 1916. When Bihar got its own High Court in Patna in 1916, the scene of Dr. Rajendra Prasad's activities shifted. "What was your peak income" ? I enquired. "Three to four thousand rupees per month in 1917," he answered humbly. However, 3 to 4 thousand per month in 1917 was



a big sum. As a practitioner of law he came into contact with such giants of the profession as Rashbihari Ghosh and C. R. Das.

His political initiation came in 1917. Mahatma Gandhi had returned home with a South African halo around him. By some odd coincidence, he was attracted towards the workers in the indigo plantations of Bihar. Champaran was destined to be the scene of the first Indian victory of *satyagraha*. Rajendra was then only 33 years and yet already he was hailed as the rising hope of the newly autonomous Province of Bihar. Until then Bihar formed a part of Bengal and constituted the "Lower Provinces". There was something providential in the meeting of the Master and the pupil. Since then Rajendra Prasad has stuck to Mahatma Gandhi and been a regular in-again-and-out-again prisoner, like many other Congress leaders.

Around this time, a call came from the late Mr. Gokhale to join the Servants of India Society, an organisation of liberals and Moderates. As it happened, he did not join the "Moderate" Gokhale and embraced instead non-violent direct action to uproot the British. Gandhi himself was offered

a similar alternative upon Gokhale's death and the Mahatma made the same choice. In a way, it is this decision that eventually brought Rajendra Prasad to the Government House. The "moderates" and the "liberals", although respected, are in the wilderness today.

In 1920 Babu Rajendra Prasad suspended his legal practice and plunged into the Non-Co-operation Movement. He was soon chosen as the General Secretary of the Congress and later as a member of the Working Committee. He has the distinction of being among a few men who have served as Congress President for half a dozen years. He was the *Rashtarpati* in 1932, 1934, 1939. In 1947, he was again called upon to head the Congress organisation.

Came the Constituent Assembly. A man, who, like Ruskin, knew the art of compromise, was required to be the President of the Constituent Assembly. A man who could reflect all the shades of public opinion was necessary. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the unanimous choice and he served in that capacity for three years beginning with 1946. In the Interim Government formed both by the Congress and the Muslim



League, Babu Rajendra Prasad was the Member for Food and Agriculture. When, after partition, the National Government was formed in 1947, he became the first Minister for food and Agriculture. The climax came when India became a Republic and he ascended the lofty stairs of the Government House.

### *The "Doctor's Dilemma"*

Babu Rajendra Prasad is described as a "Doctor" oftener than any other leader of India. That is a "fraud", explained "Dr." Rajendra Prasad smilingly. The Honorary Degree of LL.D. was given to him by the Allahabad University. Later on, he received Honorary Doctorates from Agra, Patna and Banaras. The general belief in the Western word is that Honorary Doctorates do not entitle a man to be called a "Doctor"; the title of "Doctor" has to be earned. Nevertheless, if any of India's top leaders deserves the title of a "Doctor", Babu Rajendra Prasad is one. He has been a brilliant student, always standing first in class, college and University. He received the M. A. Degree from the Presidency College, Calcutta, standing first class first, as he had stood first class first in B. A. When he became an M.L. in 1915, again he was first.

Indeed he had planned to write a thesis on Hindu Law which would have entitled him to a Doctorate, but he did not finish it.

### *Numerous Vital Statistics*

Here are some of the vital statistics and in a big familyman's case, vital statistics have to be numerous. He was born on Decemder 3, 1884, in the Saran District of North Bihar in the village of Zeradi. He was born in a Kayastha family whose ancestral homes in succession were in Fatehpur Sikri and Amorha. A stalwart by the name of Chitoodas bought a Zemindari in Zeradi in Bihar. Kayasthas are *Kshatriyas* by birth but they are more like Brahmins in profession. "They live by their wits", explained Babu Rajendra Prasad. Until very recently, Kayasthas dominated the political and professional scene in Bihar. Now a serious challenge has come from Bhumihar Brahmins.

Rajendra Prasad's father, Munshi Mahdeo Sahay, was a modest landlord. "Our income was around Rs. 8000 a year". Upon his father's death in 1907, when Rajendra Babu was only 23, Mahendra Prasad, the elder brother, became the head of the family. "I was not very helpful to



my own sons. My elder brother took care of them as he took care of me", said Babu Rajendra Prasad wistfully.

The whole family participated in the Non-cooperation Movement. Rajen Babu's two sons boycotted Government schools and colleges. The elder one, Mrityunjaya Prasad, served for a while on Gandhiji's *Young India*. "I never interfered in my son's careers but I naturally wanted them to follow in Gandhiji's footsteps. Now they are making a living the best way they can". The elder son is at present the Secretary of the Bihar Branch of the Oriental Insurance Company. Dhananjay Prasad Verma is a businessman in the Saran District of Bihar. A son of Rajendra Prasad's elder brother is an engineer. All together the President of India has 17 grandchildren, 15 of them girls.

Shrimati Rajbansi Devi, the first lady of the land, is a retiring type of doting Grandmother. She has not much of a public life, but lately she has become the President of the Subsidiary Foods Committee started by Mrs. K. M. Munshi. Until they moved to New Delhi in 1946, Rajendra Babu had very little of family life, always being

away on Party work or in Jail. Now, evenings and mornings, family members gather around him, and grand-children play while he spins.

### *Beginnings in Bihar*

Each leader in India has, fortunately or unfortunately, Provincial overtones. That is natural. A public figure must have his constituency and his native field of work. In the case of Rajendra Prasad, however, the Provincial story plays a greater than usual role. It must be recalled that Bihar was not even a Province when Rajendra Prasad entered public life. It was a part of the great Province of Bengal. As such, there was an autonomy movement in Bihar which made the general outlook much more parochial. So the Bihari thread runs rather prominently into the pattern of Rajendra Prasad's career. He started as a Bihari but ended up as the President of All-India.

In 1916 Sir Shankaran Nair, then Education Member, introduced a bill on Patna University. Babu Rajendra Prasad thought the bill to be reactionary and he organised the provincial intelligentsia to fight against it. He succeeded, and thus captured the imagination of the newly formed



Province of Bihar, so much so that next year, when the University came into being, he was appointed to its Senate.

The slogan of Non-Co-operation dominated the Indian scene from 1920 onwards. With nothing more than Rs. 15 in the bank, Babu Rajendra Prasad gave up his legal profession and jumped into the fray. From then on he became the boss of the Congress Party in Bihar. In 1924 he became the Chairman of the Patna Municipality but resigned in disgust after 15 months of work. He belonged to the "no-changer" wing of the Congress Party in 1924; he was one with Gandhiji and Rajaji in opposing Pandit Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, who wanted the Congress to enter the Central Legislature. In the same year, he was elected President of Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, a position he held for years.

The organiser in Rajendra Prasad came to the fore during the great Bihar Earthquake of January 15, 1934. He was released from prison on account of poor health, but he defied his doctors and took up relief work. The whole country was full of praise for his administrative capacities, and the fund started after his name

rivalled the fund started by the Viceroy himself. He became almost a professional organiser of earthquake relief; in 1935 came the Quetta Earthquake and the services of Babu Rajendra Prasad were enlisted.

The Congress Working Committee has always been representative of Provincial variations. Bihar was always there and always represented by Babu Rajendra Prasad. In 1936, he was a member of the Congress Parliamentary Board, which controlled and conducted elections. In 1937, when ministries were formed in the Congress Provinces, Babu Rajendra Prasad refused the plums.

The peace-maker in Rajendra Prasad has always come to the rescue of the Congress whenever dissensions rent the party. After the Subhash Bose affair, it was Babu Rajendra Prasad who was called upon to place the Congress house in order. So also after the Kripalani affair. He is the "Old Faithful" who could always be relied upon. He has the capacity to emphasise the points of agreement and overlook the points of disagreement. He can rightfully be described as the



“Compromise President”, be it the Congress Party, or the Indian Government.

*Bengal in the Bihari.*

The Bihar-consciousness always comes to the fore in relation to Bengal. Until very recently, Bihar was a mere part of Subai-Bengal a' La Mugal tradition. Even now, after the success of the autonomy movement, the services in Bihar are dominated by Bengalis. Thus Bengal and Bengalis are the *bete noire* of Biharis.

And yet there is so much of Bengal in the Bihari Rajendra Prasad that it almost sounds like a back-handed compliment. Rajendra Prasad's happy student days were in Calcutta. His personal, intimate, non-political friendships were formed in Calcutta. Even today, Mr. J. N. Mazumdar, Retired Judge and now on the Labour Tribunal, is the most intimate friend that Rajendra Prasad has. He stays at the Government House whenever in Delhi and calls our President by his first name, “Rajendra”. There are two other Bengalis who can be counted among the most intimate associates of the President on non-political, non-party level, and who are on “Tum-Tam” familiarity with the President.

Rajendra Prasad rose as a Bihari in a world dominated by Bengal, and yet his political make-up has the lingering effects of the Bengal Partition and Swadeshi Movement. To clinch the argument about the Bengali overtones in the character of this Bihari, it can be revealed that the only game that Babu Rajendra Prasad ever played was football. "I was rather good at it".

Babu Rajendra Prasad is less Westernized than any other top leader of India. There are no Western tones, undertones, or overtones in his character. In fact, he has hardly been out of India. In 1927 he toured Ceylon. In 1928 he went to England in connection with the famous Dumraon Raj Case and took the opportunity to tour the Continent. But even while abroad, he acted in the Gandhian spirit. He turned the trip into a pilgrimage and went to Switzerland for the *Darshan* of Romain Rolland, the French biographer of Gandhi, who had acquired fame in India as a seer.











- *Behind his dark glasses lurks a twinkle, as mysterious as Mona Lisa's smile.*

## **RAJAJI : THE ELDER STATESMAN**

BECOMING more and more famous as a tower of strength to the Prime Minister, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari is even more famous for the numerous and dramatic come-backs he has staged during the brief history of Indian nationalism. Just when others thought he had shot his bolt, he returned to power with added vigour. Now regarded as the elder statesman of India, Rajaji was once in eclipse following his premature recognition of the principle of Pakistan. But when the Coalition Government was formed in 1946, he came back as a Central Minister. Again eclipsed, he went to Bengal as the Governor. "I am going to my political grave", he said jestingly to his friends. Then came the culmination of his career when he was appointed the first Indian Governor



General. Again a victim of the Hindi-English controversy and of the Brahmin Non-Brahmin politics, he left the Government House and retired. From a quiet corner he was once more called to Delhi to become a Minister Without Portfolio. Following Sardar Patel's death, he became the Home Minister.

### *Last of the Hastings*

However, ascending the Government House as the first Indian Governor General remains the culmination of his career ; the latter position is an anti-climax. One thing was sure. C. Rajagopalachari was the most logical choice as the last of the 'Warren Hastings', and as the first Indian Governor General. He has been an outstanding Congress leader, with more than 25 years of service to the nation behind him. Intellect, and not emotion, is his stock-in-trade. The honorific position he once occupied was much like the symbolic Crown, which coldly shines but never simmers. It was an office which demanded a certain amount of detachment. The man whose jaw-breaking name is often condensed into a simple "C.R.", and who is more often affectionately addressed as Rajaji, has it. He is calm and

collected and calculating. Rajaji is a party man who has often defied his party. A Governor General was supposed to rise above party level ; for he represented all. Rajaji filled the bill.

Another thing was sure when Rajaji was selected as the Governor General. No other choice would have been more whole-heartedly welcomed either in England or in Pakistan. From among the rebel fold, Rajaji has always been a favourite of the British. Even British socialists have conservative instincts and Rajaji has been a "lovable conservative". As the Prime Minister of Madras in 1937 and 1939, he was admired by Indians, but simply adored by the British. On July 28, 1940 at Poona, it was he who convinced the All-India Congress Committee of the wisdom of the war effort, although that effort did not materialise. I was in America in those days, and I clearly remember how British publicity officers built him up as the only statesman in India. He has been the teacher's pet. No wonder the *London Mail* editorialised: "C.R's versatility, intellectual alertness and unsatiable curiosity remind one of the first Governor General of India, Warren Hastings."



Now let us turn to Pakistan, which was almost as jubilant as, if not more than, India over C.R.'s appointment as the first Governor General of India. The Pakistan press was so enthusiastic as to imply that India was paying a special compliment to Pakistan, as if it was poetic justice that the twin architects of the Partition plan should be the first Governor Generals of the twin Dominions. Mr. Jinnah was not as spontaneous or whole-hearted, on Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom as on Rajaji's elevation to heights equal to his own. He threw to the winds his usual reserve and aloofness and wrote to Rajaji: "My warm congratulations on your appointment as Governor General of the Indian Dominion. Under your guidance, I hope, will come real friendship between the two Dominions. It is no less essential to India than to Pakistan".

Yet another thing was certain. No other man than C. Rajagopalachari could have replaced Earl Mountbatten of Burma so conclusively. When Lord Mountbatten left the Government House, it marked the end of an era; Rajaji striding up the marble steps signified the beginning of a new era. It was a clean break. It indicated so deep a psychological revolution that it required

marked changes in physical details so as to register the upheaval in the minds of men. No other Indian leader could have offered a sharper contrast to Lord Mountbatten. The former Commander of the Commandoes is a dashing figure, tall, white and handsome. If Gandhiji reminded an American correspondent of Mickey Mouse, Rajaji reminded another of a turkey. Too frail a body supports on a turkey neck, fully furnished with a well-developed Adam's apple, too big a head, bald and egg-shaped. A jutting lower lip and a beaky nose complete the picture. There are two more details ; the slight figure stoops over a cane and the very very dark glasses are so inseperable as to form a part of his physiognomy. You would never know what lies behind those dark glasses, humour or sarcasm, sympathy or tolerance, approval or boredom. Lord Mountbatten is a socialite, colourful and volatile ; Rajaji is quiet and cozy and heavy-footed ; Lord Mountbatten was at his best in large parties with an appropriate word for each guest, informal and undemanding, yet the image of pomp and circumstance ; Rajaji has a quiet dignity, but he is the very antithesis of pomp and circumstance.



The Government House under Lord Mountbatten was almost the last Governmental place where a party meant well-chosen whisky. Rajaji is not merely a teatotalter, but he is an evangelical teatotalter. He is a fanatic against drinks and drugs; he has written a "*Prohibition Manual*" which tells you all about drinks and drugs; he was the Secretary of the Prohibition League of India; his own District of Salem was the first area in India to go completely dry under his regime in Madras. The Government House under Lord Mountbatten was full of black ties and vintage wines. Fluttering dhoties and excellent South Indian coffee in Rajaji's Government House were the visible symbols of the new age.

### *The Parabolizer*

He is *The Brain*. Rajaji brings to All-India politics the subtleties of mind of a Southern Brahmin. He is a great debator, not colourful but lawyer-like, not an orator but a pleader; his famous forensic powers have been the undoing of many an adversary. His mind is analytical and he is a past-master at dialectics. He reminds one of a Brahmin Savanarola. His interests are earnest: he has written books on Socrates and

Marcus Aurelius in Tamil and he has been influenced by Thoreau and John Stuart Mill. However, he has a lighter as well as a creative side. He has written chatty stories both in Tamil and English, and he has made *Gita* and *Upanishads* easy for Indian readers. Most of his stories are parables, instruments to popularize causes near to his heart. Even in his speeches he uses parables. He has written several political tracts and, while Mahatma Gandhi was in jail, he edited *The Young India* for a while. He is a fine story-teller but he is more caustic than witty. That makes him quick at repartee, but at someone else's cost.

With young people he can be as kindly and sympathetic as a father. I remember the advice he gave us youngsters on one occasion. "If you are preparing to go to jail", he told our group, "the giving up of the morning tea is not so essential as the giving up of the morning newspaper. That's the thing you will miss most. And also get ready to do without fresh air. You will soon learn that it is not so important after all". And he has, by the way, written one of the most amusing jail diaries that I have come across.



Chakravarti (World-Conqueror) Rajagopal-achari was born in 1879 (that makes him around 71 now, the ideal age for leadership in India) in a village near Hosur in the Salem District of Madras, of distinguished Brahmin parents. He finished his studies at Law College, Madras, but the highest degrees he received were simple B. A. and B. L. However, within a short time of his joining the Bar in 1900, he built up a very lucrative practice. Had he stayed away from politics and stuck to Law he would have amassed a tidy fortune. That was not to be. A strange little brown man in loin cloth was beckoning Indians of talent for the service of their Motherland, and Rajaji responded in 1919 by joining the Non-Cooperation Movement. One of the points on which the nationalists were to non-cooperate with the British *Raj* was law practice in courts set up by the aliens. Rajaji non-cooperated and stopped being a lawyer. Ever since then Rajaji had been one of the closest and the most orthodox disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, not only in politics but in life. Taking the cue from his Master, Rajaji developed fads. Besides the bias against drinks he developed biases in favour of low salaries and *khadi* (home

spun cloth). This political *entente* was later underscored by an *entente cordiale* at the family level. C. R's daughter married the Mahatma's son. In a province raging with a Brahmin versus non-Brahmin war, he was brave to defy the caste system by allowing his daughter to marry a Vaishya.

Rajaji became the high priest of Gandhism. He led a simple life, so much so that he had not seen a movie until 1938 when he saw a Mickey Mouse cartoon in the company of another movie-virgin—Mahatma Gandhi.

Rajaji also became the interpreter of Gandhiji's political principles. When Gandhiji was in jail in 1921, a great controversy arose between the "Pro-Changers" and the "No-Changers", between those who wanted to go to the Legislative Assembly and those who wanted to continue Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement. Rajaji led the latter fold, and won out against such stalwarts as the late Pandit Motilal Nehru and the late Deshbandhu Das. His stock rose suddenly. He became the General Secretary of the Congress; he had been a member of the Working Committee since then up to 1942, when he went out of the fold because of serious differences.



*The Come-Back Man*

He has the courage of his convictions, Rajaji has. The fateful year 1942 proved it. India was seething with the preparations for the August Revolution. "Quit India" was in the air. The Congress had decided not to aid Britain in the World War II. Rajaji was opposed to all this. He pleaded for caution, advocated the granting of the principle of Pakistan in the interest of communal harmony, tried to show the justness of the war and thus antagonised most of his colleagues and burnt his political boats. Rajaji remained out while his erstwhile co-workers were behind prison bars and while others worked underground. When the leaders were released in 1946, they dropped Rajaji like a hot potato. He was scuttled. But this condition did not last long. The leaders began to rely upon him once more and began to realise in retrospect how wise his vision was.

That come-back was in 1946, and let us recapitulate to emphasize the point; it showed a touch of Richelieu. He was taken as a Minister in free India's first Government, then as the Governor of West Bengal, later as the Governor

General. Even after retirement he was called to join the Cabinet.

During the recent Presidential contest between Babu Purshottamdas Tandon and Acharya Kripalani, Rajaji along with Maulana Saheb shined as a peacemaker between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. As member of the Cabinet Committee on External Affairs, Rajaji gives the benefit of his wisdom to his chief. As the Head of the Cabinet Economic Committee, he strives to bring stability into an otherwise fluid financial picture. But above all, he is one of the living monuments that foreigners would like to see while in India. Among the sweet memories they carry back are the evidences of Rajaji's ready wit. He is one of India's greatest friend-getters among the foreigners. It is not wit alone, it is also his charm that touches distinguished visitors to Delhi.

Recently we dined together at Sri Devdas Gandhi's. Y. Saburo Matsukata, Chief of the Kyodo News Service of Japan, was the chief guest. Over a typically Indian meal in plantain leaves, Mr. Matsukata revealed that Emperor Hirohito is a distinguished scientist. He is also a renowned



poet. "Every Emperor has to be a poet", he added. "Like the Nizam of Hyderabad", Rajaji remarked. Rajaji revealed that he has an autographed poem from the Nizam.

The man who possessed a fleet of limousines as the Governor General of India now moves about in Delhi in the smallest car possessed by any Central Minister—Sir Chintaman Deshmukh being his closest rival. Neither age nor poor health dims the brightness of his intellect, or slows down the tempo of his service to his motherland.







- ◆ *He boasted that his only culture was agriculture, and yet enriched Gujarati language and literature, and consolidated a sub-continent.*

## **PATEL : A POSTHUMOUS FORCE**

Time : Monday, October, 10, 1949.

Place : The Council House, New Delhi

Scene : The variegated group of constitution-makers, in a variety of costumes, was debating whether to spell out special guarantees for the famed I. C. S. officers, supposedly orphaned by the British departure. A veteran Congressman was holding forth, playing the popular tune. Why should free India give guarantees to ex-traitors ? Why this exception ? Half way through, however, he took a somersault. To his listeners' bewilderment, he began to sponsor the proposal instead of opposing it. The anti-climax was reached, and the point of high drama.



*A Fact of Power.*

For, meanwhile, the dramatic element had entered the House. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, standing almost on the eve of his 74th birthday, had quietly slipped in by the side-entrance. He walked in with less steady steps on account of his recent illness, and yet in that self-assured march to the Front Bench there was the lingering memory of his former stride, which was measured by the reveille that thundered in his soul. He stretched his legs on the bench in order to cool his heels, his heavy eyelids dropping down deep sockets in a face darker than before his illness. His impressive and massive head, now a shiny plate of baldness, stooped with bull-necked pride. At times his eyes were half-closed as he listened, a picture of a dozing lion. But when someone came to the lion, his eyes opened quickly and they looked like burning coals. He managed to give an impression of well-controlled energy. But he was in no haste ; he never was.

It was Sardar Patel's entrance that had compelled the sudden change in the tune ; for, the veteran Congressman who was holding forth knew well that Sardar Patel had adopted the Indian orphans of the British. It was under the aegis of

Sardar Patel that I. C. S. officers had acquired more control in independent India than they had ever enjoyed under the British. Certain things could not be said in the Sardar's presence ! This was a fresh manifestation of Sardar's ability to produce what the Gujaratis call "dha", and no English equivalent is adequate to convey the meaning. It was a quality that unnerves the opponent and strikes terror, inspires awe and respect at the same time. It is an effect produced by grim appearance, by brusqueness of personal contacts, by the straight-from-the-shoulder manner of his words, by his impatience of idle talkers and of armchair revolutionaries and of political upstarts. Above all, it was an effect produced by titanic achievement. It was based on reputation. The Sardar had the reputation, rightly or wrongly, of being the Giant-Killer. To put it bluntly, he was more feared than adored. Compelling presence was Sardar Patel's greatest attribute ; so much so that his mere appearance on the scene heartened his followers and frightened his enemies. He was the most formidable figure of modern India, a fact of power.

He killed the giant of centrifugal forces. When our freedom was fledgling and our future



trembling in the balance, when the scum was coming to the surface following the disappearance of the British steamroller, when the country was in the grip of communal madness, when ambitious adventurers were trying to fish in troubled waters to carve out personal empires from a continent in transition, the Sardar set himself to work, and with patience, with dexterity, using persuasion here and the big stick there, resorting to bluff where bluff worked and to force where force was needed, produced a unitary India never before more integrated since the time of Akbar. He prevented the great collapse that the enemy had expected ; he staved off the crumbling of a country. Mother India's face was disfigured by some 563 pock-marks. Rejuvenation is an ancient art in India and the Sardar applied the balm that smoothed the skin.

Contemplating the astonishing phenomenon of the integration of States, scholars have compared the Sardar to Wellesley or to Dalhousie, but the Bismarkian analogy is more appropriate, if only we remember that Germany can be a mere pocket of even a truncated India. Like Bismark, the Sardar seldom smacked his head against a stone wall. His strong actions were

seldom taken outside the realm of the possible. The Princely India was a house of cards. Nevertheless, this achievement alone is sufficient to make Sardar an immortal of Indian history. Some left behind pyramids and others celestial poetry. The "good earth" of India, undulating but unbroken in its green vastness, is the Sardar's legacy. Gandhiji must have foreseen the future as early as the Bardoli days when he dubbed Vallabhbhai "The Peasant Generalissimo" (*Khedutona Sardar*). His has been a typically peasant contribution.

Sardar Patel was a practical man. The real difference between a practical man and an idealist is that the former believes in a system of priorities while the latter flourishes by ignoring it. First things first, according to the realist; the dream is the thing for the idealist. The practical man is preoccupied with the next step, while the idealist perches himself on the top of the ladder without climbing it and flies away with the reputation of having been born ahead of his time. The practical man looks humdrum, while the idealistic flights are most spectacular. But the idealist would drop from his high perch unless the realist is there to hold his ladder, much in the same way



as the realist would lose himself in details if the idealist is not there to keep afresh the vision of the promised land. Each is complimentary to the other. Sardar and his colleague, Pandit Nehru, were complimentary to each other by temperament. They remained complimentary to each other and thus strengthened each other for a long while. But, alas..... .

Almost on the morrow of freedom our country emerged as the leading nation in Asia and as an eminent State in the comity of nations, thanks to the élan and dynamism of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. But outer glow is born of inner health; international prestige is based on national stability. There was the question of priorities. The topmost post-freedom priority in India was the stability of the State, and Sardar Patel gave it to the country. As the Home Minister, he consolidated the police and the secret service and won over the loyalty of the Civil Service, the last perhaps at too great a price. By persuading the more radical of his colleagues to strike a middle course in economic policies, he kept the powerful tycoons within the bounds, that, too, perhaps at too high a price. And by fulfilling his pledges given to the unhorsed Princes,

he retained their loyalty and support. There are critics galore who doubt the wisdom of Sardar's preferences. But we are talking about priorities and all these steps led towards India's integration. Latterly, he inspired the Congress to keep an open-door policy towards the R. S. S. Some critics fear that this would dilute the spirit of a secular State. However, there is logic enough to believe that all these steps have contributed towards the consolidation and the stability of the State. In judging Sardar Patel, the ideological yardstick is not enough; his actions should be appraised on the background of the system of priorities; and the stability of the State had received the top priority in his scheme of things. A conservative always puts a premium on stability and security.

Sardar's Policy towards the R.S.S. highlighted not only one more aspect of Patel-Nehru "Dyarchy"; it also threw light on the nature of the Congress party. To Pandit Nehru's mass appeal, Sardar Patel brought his redoubtable organizing skills which created one of the biggest political machines in the world.



*The Horse Sense*

By birth and training Sardar was eminently suited for the role of the Boss in a country of villages. He came from the caste of Patidars, who are the farmers of Gujarat. This has played a significant part in his career. India is a country of farmers and the Sardar could speak their language and understand their problems. The son of an agriculturist, he was born in Kheda District on 31st October, 1875. His strong-willed and strong-bodied father used to take young Vallabhbhai to the fields, giving him lessons on the way and during the work. These were Sardar Patel's first lessons in "mental arithmetic" at which our farmers are adept.

In the year 1901, when he passed his Pleader-ship Examination, a typical choice confronted him. He wanted to go to London to become a Barrister-at-Law, but so did his elder brother, and there just was not enough money in the family to carry them both through school in England. So, he chose to remain at home, while his brother, the late Vithalbhai Patel, went to England. This peculiar partnership proved to be life long; Vithalbhai always earned the honours while

Vallabhbhai worked behind the scenes. Later on, Vithalbhai became the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly while the Sardar stayed away from Delhi and worked among the people to put thunder in his elder brother's throat.

For the next 9 years, he practised law to earn enough money to go to England. Finally, in 1910, he set off and within two years passed his Law Examination with honours. The Middle Temple called him to the Bar in 1913 and the same year he returned to India. In no time he became well-known as a criminal-lawyer and his ability to floor the contending lawyer by fair means or foul earned him a waiting line of clients. But his real opportunity came around 1920 when he offered to defend, in some cases gratis, those Patidars and Dharalas who were charged by the Government with violent acts committed during the non-violent, non-cooperation movement.

The Sardar's conversion to Gandhism came during 1917-18, but it was a tough and a long-drawn-out affair. In those days Gandhiji used to frequent the Gujarat Club in Ahmedabad with a view to enlisting outstanding citizens in his political campaigns. Patel was one member of the club



who sneered at the Mahatma, remained aloof, drank whisky, chain-smoked, and went on playing cards. Presently the Mahatma fascinated Patel. Soon Patel became Gandhiji's righthand man, and sometimes even the left.

A series of campaigns followed in which Patel acted as the General and Gandhiji as the guiding spirit. In 1917 it was the Kheda No-Tax Campaign ; then the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha ; then the Borsad No-Tax Campaign ; finally, in 1928, came the famous Bardoli Satyagraha, which up to this day remains the perfect example of non-violent direct action. It was during this struggle that India found in Patel her supreme organiser, a brilliant campaigner and a master of manoeuvres. Even Gandhiji could not do better in planning and executing a campaign. It was for his Bardoli record that Patel was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1931 when Nationalists had scored their greatest victory up to that date. The Sardar's organising abilities were again enlisted in 1936 to handle the first national elections. The hero of Bardoli had never embraced *ahimsa* as an article of faith, but his acceptance of it as a matter of policy was enough to give him golden opportunities to show

his organising skills. To Gandhi's Lenin he played Stalin.

### *Remote Control*

And yet it was only after 1930 that Patel became a familiar face outside of Gujarat. For, he always felt more at home when exercising remote control and doing some long-distance wire pulling. There is an anecdote that he never tired of recounting for the benefit of his young Socialist opponents who, according to him, needed to learn the art of silent work. Patel said that once during an annual session of the Congress at Calcutta he failed to accompany Gandhiji to the huge meeting tent for some reason or other. Later on, he went to the meeting, but the volunteers at the door did not recognise him. So he went back to his own little tent and took a long nap. He worked for every inch of his pre-eminence. In consequence, his was a careeristic view of politics.

Sardar Patel had neither Gandhiji's disarming simplicity, nor Nehru's fascinating polish. He was no orator like Mrs. Naidu and his English speeches could be put down as definitely mediocre. His verbal efforts in Hindustani were indeed amusing. But when it came to addressing farmers



in Gujarati, even the Mahatma could not approach him. All the celebrated speakers and august orators of India took their hats off to Patel in the pure art of plain speaking in a language that the tiller of the soil could relish. Patel's sarcasm was vindictive, his tongue acid, his jokes barbed and biting like farmers' jokes, his images bizarre, and his language loamy. He had nothing but scorn for the literary and this enabled him to blaze new trails and thus to enrich his mother tongue in a way nobody else had. I have a feeling, along with many other Gujarati writers, that Sardar Patel's speeches during the Bardoli campaign will some day be generally regarded as great examples of what Gujarati prose can do.

Patel joked as Gujarati peasants would joke. During the Bardoli campaign, for instance, the Government confiscated the cattle of those farmers who refused to pay the land revenue. The black buffaloes of the farmers were herded together in crowded corrals, but otherwise the Government neglected the animals. Under such unhygienic conditions the buffaloes began to shed and languish until their hides actually lost all pigmentation. Not long afterwards, Sardar Patel remarked in one of his speeches to the peasants : "Our White

sahibs took away our buffaloes but they did not like them black, so they made them as white as their Mem Sahibs". The farmers relished the joke so much that it has become a classic.

The Sardar was not dramatising his qualities when he claimed that his "only culture" was agriculture; he was simply stating a handy truth which did him more good than harm. Soon after the process of integration started, he went to Orissa. On the platform most of the Princes were lined up by Mr. V. P Menon ready to sign the covenant. One Maharaja was hesitating. Mr. Menon introduced him to the Sardar saying, "He wants to ask something". The Sardar asked: "Is he a Prince or a beggar"? That was the end of the Maharaja's petition.

Gandhiji had a saint's control over his senses, while the Sardar had a General's complete control over his nerves and emotions. When the body of his brother Vithalbhai Patel was brought to India from Europe, for instance, the Government offered to release the Sardar from prison, but only upon certain conditions. He chose to remain locked up.



It seems to me that one of the reasons why the Sardar was sometimes regarded as bourgeois was that he did not always understand young people, let alone arouse confidence in them. Perhaps it was the Hindu traditionalist in him which regarded youth as an object which should be seen and not heard. Most of the Socialists and rebels have been young men and women. The personal bitterness created by the Sardar's patriarchal attitude was increased by the knowledge that he did hobnob with the financially mighty.

He had come a long way. The hero of Bardoli had become the "iron man" of India. A provincial leader emerged as the one-half of a "dyad" that ruled the roost in this country under a new-fangled form of "dyarchy". But his colleagues and followers remember him best in his capacity as a day-to-day co-worker.

His early morning walks used to be like a walking *darbar*. Flanked by Kumari Maniben he used to walk towards the Lodi Gardens with the briskness of a young man. Behind him would be Shri G. D. Birla, Speaker Mavlankar and other friends. Still behind would be 20 to 30 interviewers with more hope than prospect.

One by one they would be called by Kumari Maniben to have a word or two with the rushing Sardar and to be dismissed as promptly. This used to be the way in which Sardar kept in touch with the common man. For, the rest of the day he was buried in his files and in conferences, behind the iron curtain of Shri V. Shankar. Many people were critical of the way an iron curtain was dropped around the Sardar. Yet, to be fair, one has to confess that by her vigilance, Kumari Maniben added at least ten years to Sardar's life and usefulness.

### *The Post-Patel India*

The death of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on December 15, 1950, marked a sharper turning-point in the infant career of independent India than did the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi three years back. Gandhi left a universal void; the void created by Patel's passing away is purely national, and so it is felt more intensely. When Gandhi died, the mantle fell collectively on Nehru and Patel, and together they were able to maintain what Gandhi maintained single-handed—the system of one party rule. Now Nehru stands supreme, but, what is more important, *he*



stands alone. On the important question of "leadership" they were rivals; yet ironically enough, Nehru is weaker without Patel at his side.

India was only one-half democracy. In a way, she was facing the cross-roads, with strong pulls in each direction. The ideology of one-party rule, which was somehow construed to be distinct from dictatorship, looked as respectable as the theory of democracy because that was the pattern all over Asia, especially in countries recently free from foreign domination. Other parties did exist in such Asian countries, but not as effective levers against an overwhelming majority solidified at the centre. So far as India is concerned, the forces of one party rule received a reversal with the death of the man who alone could have brought them victory. And if the armour of one party system is dented in India, the route is likely to be Asia-wide, from the long-range point of view.

The thing that was distinct about Sardar Patel was what the Americans call "the horse sense", and what Indians call wisdom. He was a good judge of men and issues, and his likes and dislikes were urgent. It was his habit to see a thing through once he started it. A discerning

tribute was paid to him by one of his avowed opponents, the Premier of Pakistan, Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan. He said : "One could strongly differ from him in his policies and methods, but in dealing with him one always knew what he meant and also knew that he meant it". This is the point that illuminates Patel and illuminates post-Patel India. Patel was a strong man, and now India is without a strong man.

He really left behind a personal empire. In replacing Patel as the Home Minister, C. Rajagopalachari now directly governs Delhi, Ajmer-Merwara, Coorg, the islands of Andamans and Nicobar ; all-told an area of some 7000 square miles and a population of 1,700,000 people. In replacing Patel as the States Minister, N. Gopalswamy Ayyangar rules over one-fourth of India, either through his Chief Commissioners, or through his chosen Ministers responsible to no legislature. These 277,340 square miles comprise Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, PEPSU, Bhopal, Manipur and Tripura.

The passing away of a strong man always creates a serious situation. For, when a strong man dies, he not only creates a void, but he also



removes the lid. Pent-up, seething forces begin to find expression. Several political fortunes were unmade, and a few made, when the 'strong silent man' left this world. One already hears in Parliament many shaky voices and sees double that number of shaking feet.

Changes equally great will come in far-off corners. "The Lion of Gujarat" is gone, and so the most basic displacements will come in Saurashtra and Gujarat. Some people say that there are four "M"'s in the field as contestants. It should be remembered that for a long time, Gujarat's career has been the personal biography of Patel writ large. Gujarat had another advantage which may now prove to be a handicap. It was under the guidance of two titans in succession—Gandhi and Patel. This dwarfed the growth of other leaders.

Patel aided and abetted the rich, but he also kept them in line so far as the Congress was concerned. Patel aided the R.S.S. and the Hindu revivalists, but he also kept them in bound, and thus prevented the formation of an open opposition. On the one hand, Patel destroyed the Princely rule, but at the same time, he gave the Maharajas

comfortable incomes and pensions and thus retained their lip-loyalty. Somehow or other, Patel acquired the reputation of being the champion of the Sikhs and thus divided that virile community over the issue of a separate Sikh State. Victims of the partition, the refugees, also came to regard Patel as warmer friend than Nehru. By giving all these sops, Patel diverted the energies of those who were the potential opponents of the Congress regime. Now, these groups will become the breeding ground of opposition. Even the movement for Linguistic Provinces, so strong in Maharashtra, Andhra and East Punjab, had received a staggering blow when Patel sided with Nehru in pronouncing it to be reactionary and retrogressive.

The controversy between the Maharaja of Baroda and the States Ministry, which had some of the aspects of the Maharashtrian resistance to the Gujarati's steamroller, lay dormant for a long time, but in the last months of the Sardar's life, the last of the Gaekwars picked up new courage. There were rumours that some persons, very high in the Government of India and in national life, had given him some new hopes about the restoration of the geographic entity of



his former State as well as about the disputed status of his wife, Sita Devi, as the Maharani of Baroda. He made a representation to the President of India, challenging the legality of the merger of his State in the Bombay Province. Unwilling to undo what the Sardar had done, the Prime Minister reacted very strongly and the Government of India cited a Press Communique issued on January 31, 1949, in which the Maharaja was quoted to have said: "In accordance with the advice given to me by Sardar Patel, I have decided to integrate my state with the Province of Bombay". Just before taking off for Europe on one of his frequent trips, the Maharaja retorted that the above-quoted Press Communique was not issued by him, nor was it issued with his knowledge. The States Ministry's rejoinder was equally sharp and full of threats: "You have attempted to go back on your solemn declarations. You have gone even further and challenged the Constitution of India to which you now owe the generous provisions made therein for maintaining your status and dignity including such advantages as a liberal privy purse (Rs. 26½ lakhs a year) and other privileges". The stink started. Many people knew that the generous provisions made

for the Maharajas could not long survive the Sardar.

As India prepared for the coming general elections, a good number of Princes got together in a newly-organized Union of Rulers which boasted 90 Maharajahs as members. The Maharaja of Baroda presided over their Bombay deliberations. This was the first sign of life shown by Maharajahs who had been stunned by rapid changes following independence. The new stirring among the ex-rulers indicated an awareness of the coming general election wherein Princes can play the part of hidden "angels", if not that of open contestants. The Zamindars all over India, the Jagirdars so ubiquitous in Rajasthan, and Girasdars of Saurashtra were also up in arms. They were bolder than the Maharajahs because the die was not yet cast about their fate. Moreover, Sardar Patel was gone.

Local party bosses who derived their sustenance from Sardar Patel had sought his support in postponing the general elections ; they wanted more time to entrench themselves. Those who did not hope to be re-elected, wanted to continue in office as long as possible. They miscalculated because



they neglected to reckon with the inevitable. Sardar Patel's death has killed many a political career. Sardar used to compare the Congress to a steam-roller. The steam evaporated with him and now, the roller lay inert so far as ward-healers were concerned. When the dam is broken, democratic forces begin to reassert themselves. When the element of fear is gone, healthy instincts for change revive and sweep away the log-jam.

Within short weeks Hiralal Shastri, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, became the first post-Patel casualty. "Integration" showed some signs of disintegration in Rajasthan. Crises were brewing also in such States Unions as Mysore, Travancore-Cochin and PEPSU. The Ministry in Punjab was keeping in power largely because of Sardar's blessings. It, too, began to face greater challenge. Likewise, the present rulers of West Bengal lost a great deal of their vigour, as only Sardar was able to maintain them in teeth of strong popular resentment. The lid is lifted; no more basking in the reflected glory of a strong man at the centre. Local leaders now have a greater chance to make felt municipal autonomy.

Following Gandhiji's death, there were not many political changes because the "dyarchy" of

Nehru and Patel was able to re-place the "Monarchy" of the Mahatma. In other words, Nehru and Patel were able to maintain the Congress as the *front populaire* by one attracting the Right and the other attracting the Left. Many impartial observers felt that the "dyarchy" of Nehru and Patel was essential during the months following the Mahatma's martyrdom in order to keep together a national mosaic that might have easily developed distortions. But as things settled and months rolled by, the dyarchy deteriorated into an opportunistic (some dubbed it even "unholy") alliance.

The ideological differences between the two were unbridgable ; temperamental differences were even more jarring ; personal rivalries bobbed up in petty things, especially among their respective courtiers and camp-followers. Yet each stuck to the other politically, because each knew he was the stronger by having the other by his side. This was the seeming contradiction of the Indian situation. One rival did not wish the elimination of the other simply because he knew that to his personal strength was added the reflected glory of the other.



Down below, the effect was devastating. There were two Governments where there ought to have been one. Even Civil Service officials, whose boast has been that they are always above politics, were divided among themselves as Nehru-men and Patel-men, and the Government was at a stand-still simply because it was difficult to take a unanimously satisfying decision in the Cabinet. Within the party itself, dissensions deepened.

The break was a-coming even during the last months of Sardar Patel's earthly existence. On September 15, 1950, on the eve of the Nasik session of the Congress, Pandit Nehru issued a statement that publicised the split that existed between the two schools of thought. The spring-board was the election of Babu Purshottamdas Tandon as the Congress President, which was interpreted in the Nehru quarters as a victory for the reactionaries and revivalists.

Pandit Nehru made his own position clear and enunciated his philosophy in a historic manifesto in which he stated, *inter alia* : " I am clearly of the opinion that we must aim at what has been given the name Welfare State....Any realistic approach to this problem must be well planned

and this will naturally lead to a planned and more or less controlled economy....What is still more distressing is the fact that the spread of communalism and revivalism has gradually invaded the Congress and some times even affects Government's policies....We have repeatedly declared that ours is a secular State....If we could have separated this election-running and Parliamentary activities of the Congress from its basic work, much of the trouble we have had, would not have occurred....the work of selecting candidates for the general elections can be separated from the normal work of Congress Committees.”

Tandon's election was a technical victory for Patel ; Nehru had silently backed Acharya Kripalani for the position of the Congress President. But the annual session of the Congress at Nasik over which Tandonji presided, well knew that Nehru's manifesto was issued in an “or else” spirit. As a result, Nehru's policies received an overwhelming endorsement. But even Nehru knew that his was a technical victory, and no more. Lips had moved in eulogy, but not in harmony with the beatings of hidden hearts.



The struggle did not stop there. The Kripalani group started the Democratic Front within the Congress Party and thus offered the High Command a delicate problem of discipline. Others, like Dr. P. C. Ghosh, renounced their old loyalty to the Congress and walked out of the fold to start a new group in West Bengal. Mr. T. Prakasam continued to offer formidable resistance to the Madras Ministry.

Following Patel's death, in the last week of December, 1950, Jayaparkash Narayan, the Socialist leader, had two interviews with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at, it is believed, the latter's initiative. The consistent and outstanding opponent of the "young" Socialist was gone, and with him, to some extents the loyalties of Big Business, Hindu revivalists, feudalists, and local party bosses down to ward healers. Apart from the need of closing the ranks following Sardar Patel's death, there was also the lurking desire to strengthen the Left so that there would be no complete vacuum in case the Rightists left the Congress or began to undermine Nehru by boring from within. It is true there was no outright announcement heralding the prodigals' return; the Socialist quit Congress a year ago. It is also true that Nehru, while insti-

tuting the "first step" in his projected reshuffle of the Government, ignored even the neo-Socialists who had stuck to the Congress. Yet the lack of any immediate realignment of forces did not smother the expectation that now that Nehru is the sole commander of the party, that organization will function Left of the Centre instead of to the Right of the Centre, and that sooner or later, the Leftists will overshadow or even eject the Rightists.

Politics have become much more logical now. There is a trend toward more pronounced inter-party definitions. Even Congress has started to shrink to the dimensions of a political organization from the mighty movement it once was. But here, a crucial question arises. Who will control the machinery? Nehru undoubtedly is supreme, but he does not have either the aptitude or the liking for practical politics. So far as Nehru is concerned, in many respects, Rajaji has succeeded Sardar Patel, and Rajen Babu is supposed to be above politics in his capacity as the President of the Union. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai has all the making of a successful party boss. Political observers are also watching such dark horses as Hare Krishna Mahatab and K. M. Munshi.



The Sardar has left so many orphans. If we can judge from the resolution they have passed, it will be a safe surmise to say that the Officers of the Indian Civil Service have received the most jolting blow. They seem to miss him more and mourn him more than they ever did miss or mourn the "Father of the Nation". A group of 2,000 officers, described to be the "biggest ever gathering of such officers", met and passed a resolution from which I quote: "We of the Civil Service owe a special debt to him for his confidence and support, and for his keen and unfailing solicitude of our welfare. In grateful remembrance of his services to India and his trust in us, we pledge our complete loyalty and unremitting zeal in service to the land that he helped to liberate and strengthen."

It is this mention of "loyalty" that became a burning topic of discussions in political groups in Delhi. Perhaps the wording was unfortunate, or perhaps the underlying mentality was wrong. The boast of the Civil Service has been loyalty to the State, no matter who is in power. As such, the country comes before any individual, however great. Officials of the Government should always be loyal to the land, whether that land has been



liberated or strengthened by any particular individual or not. But the critics of the Civil Service resolution on Patel's death failed to see the point. Patel had adopted the orphans left behind by the departing British. The wisdom of such great solicitude is a debatable point, but Patel did conserve the loyalty of the Civilians at a time when their services were indispensable following the British departure. By the same token, he retained the loyalty of the Police, when the infant State was in danger. Without becoming the Defence Minister, it was Patel who inspired the Army.

India's age-old cultural dynamic of personal rule in preference to the rule of law, so satisfying to the masses of men as well, so deftly but partially adopted by the British who had to deal with an alien culture, so unbrokenly continued by the Maharajahs, so consistently manifest in the entire public and private life of the Mahatma, found its unmistakable expression in the doings of Sardar Patel both as the party boss and as the administrative boss. What the liberals dubbed as "high-handed" was the norm with him, yet the majority of vocal men applauded him for two reasons: they were afraid of a man who held so many "spoils" in the hollow of his palm; and they too felt that



Indian masses had not reached the stage where they can handle democratic processes.

What is more, such oligarchical behaviour-patterns turned out to be sub-consciously acceptable even to leaders who gave intellectual allegiance to democratic clichés. When judged in the light of their actions and manners and not in the light of their words, practically each Indian Minister or leader, including Jawaharlal Nehru, played the role of a minor oriental despot. Their oligarchical behaviour and manners and actions did not very much jar upon the general sensitivity simply because there were extenuating circumstances; the masses were accustomed to such high-handedness for God knows how many centuries; the classes were brought up in the Court system wherein promotions depended not so much on talent but upon the favour of powers that-be - a Viceroy, a Mahatma, a Prime Minister, or a Party Boss. There was no vertical mobility in the party hierarchy for a long time, and even horizontal mobility ceased as soon as the Congress came to power and party circles regidified into caucus rules.

Men like Patel consciously, and men like Nehru despite themselves, believed in the famous dictum

of Dr. Sun Yat Sen that a period of "tutelage" should precede the stage of democracy so far as the masses of the Orient were concerned. Gandhiji frankly talked about "guardianship", and openly acted as a guardian. But under Nehru's elan a fashion set in to repeat cliches and slogans and ideas and ideals prevalent in democratic countries. People who only thought with the tops of their heads, and gloried in headlines-thinking, had no time to realise that what they were writing down in the first flush would later on embarrass their conservative hearts. They evolved a constitution along democratic lines, without realizing what they were doing. To show that I am not alone in this analysis, I would like to quote a line from a *Statesman* editorial dated January 8, 1950: "There seems reason to believe that the effects of the Constitution were not anticipated even by its framers, and that those who called it a potential lawyers' paradise were only too well justified".

The brave new words did not march in harmony with the beatings of conservative hearts, and this was nowhere truer as in the case of Sardar Patel. Goaded by Home Ministry, ordinances and emergency acts were instituted which looked



fully justified in the light of India's plight, but which also looked like flagrant violations of the proud professions embodied in the New Constitution. They appeared like an attempt to take away with one hand what was given by the other by the way of civil liberties and fundamental rights.

This, then, was the supreme dilemma of a man who objectively believed in strong methods but who had to follow the current fashion of "democratic clap-trap". The high courts of India, and the Supreme Court, uncovered this dilemma of oligarchs who had been reciting democratic primers. The fearless scrutiny of the Courts produced heavy casualties in the host of emergency legislations, Central and local. "Hardly a single measure has survived without partial or total invalidation". New ordinances had to be instituted to plug the holes created by the judiciary's barrage. In the light of court judgements, it appears that certain State Governments have been involved in unconstitutional acts for over a year. Calcutta's High Court agreed with Madras's that the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act is *ultra vires* of the Constitution.

The Indian élite, still instinctively in favour of personal rule but forced to the parrotry of

democracy, was trembling under the shadow of another gin it had uncorked—universal adult franchise. Strictly democratic, its very proportions in India would nonetheless make angels fear to tread. But political honesty is a rare commodity even in a country which invokes Gandhi's name at the drop of a hat; the only efforts are towards postponing the day of reckoning.

Such things are seldom said, and less often allowed to be quoted, but the Anglo-American diplomatic circles in Delhi felt that they lost their staunchest supporter when Sardar Patel died. It is true that the Sardar had decided not to interfere in the affairs that Nehru directed, especially Foreign Affairs, in exchange of the complete autonomy that he enjoyed in his own Ministries where even the Prime Minister did not interfere; but it is equally true that Patel was unhappy about India's foreign policy. By temperament he was a partisan and never a neutral. By temperament he was a conservative who opposed all fundamental social changes, and who heartily hated Communists. By temperament he was in tune with Big Business which looked to America for everything. The Sardar felt India's financial solvency in general and her industrialization



programme in particular, largely depended on American goodwill and bounty. And when the food crises became ominous, with famine appearing on the horizon, he indirectly but openly advocated collaboration with America in his Ahmedabad speech on the occasion of his 76th birthday. The inescapable inference was that he would not hesitate to see India aligned with the West because that alone, according to his light, would save his country from a catastrophe.

From the Western point of view, an "interventionist" is gone. No one of Nehru's political height is now available to challenge the doctrine of neutrality. But political and economic developments in India continue to constitute Patel into a posthumous force. According to the Technical Aid Agreement under President Truman's Point-4, signed in Delhi on December 28, 1950, the two Governments "undertake to cooperate with each other in the interchange of technical knowledge and skills". This is a type of undertaking that Nehru had resisted for a long time. The signing of the pact marked a sharp break in the three-year-old foreign policy. Some see in this the first dent in the shell of India's neutrality. Others see in it the beginning of

"benevolent" neutrality. And, as the reports of starvation deaths increased in numbers, Patel-minded men once more began to look towards America.

This is the supreme irony of a great life strongly lived. In domestic affairs, where Sardar Patel ruled unchallenged, his death has brightened the chances of the opposition. In foreign policy, a field he scrupulously avoided, he is turning out to be a posthumous force. This is India's year of decision, internally and in the world.











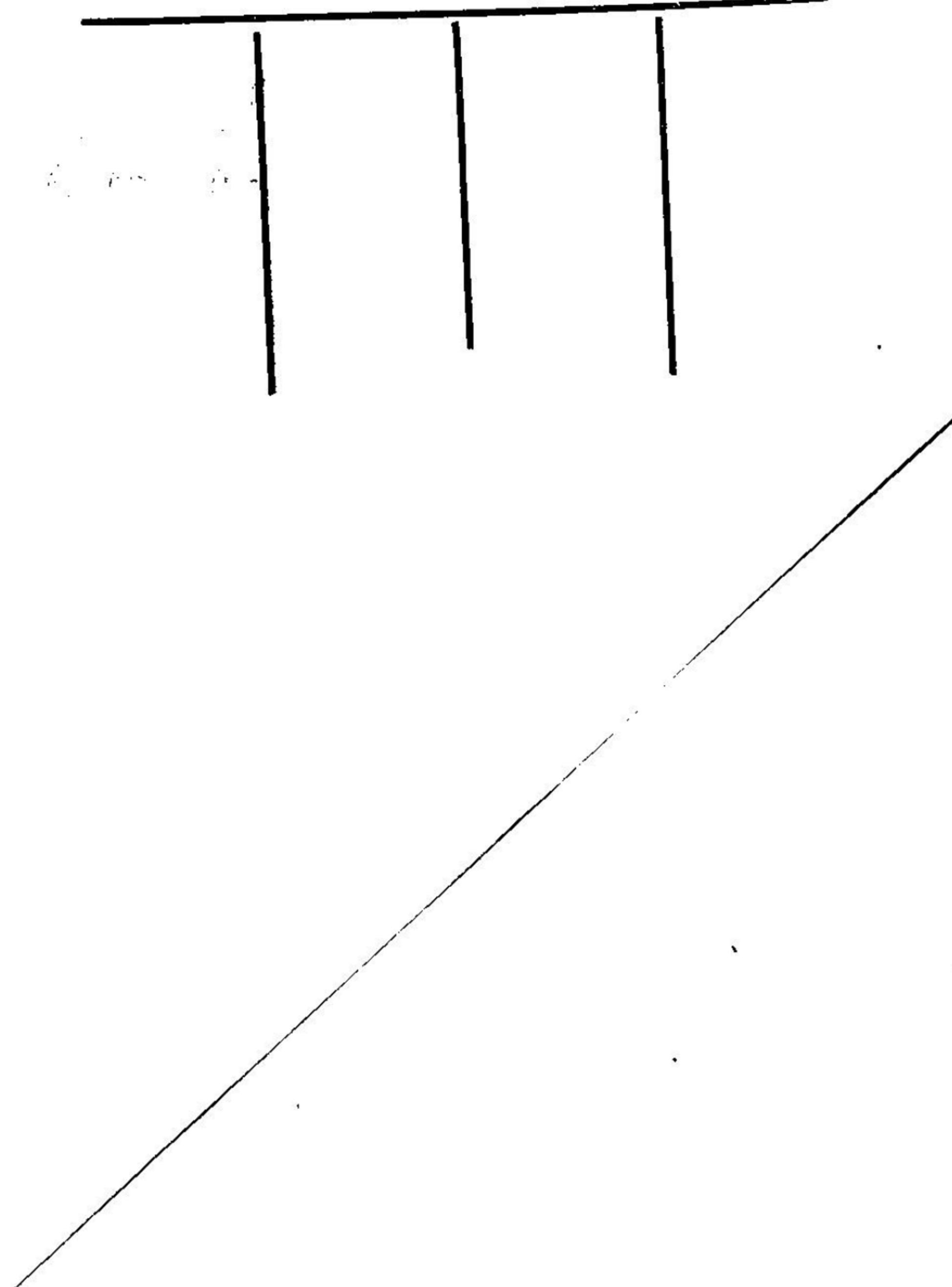
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